

Plan on a Test Drive. Let the shop know in advance that you want to test drive the car once it's fixed and before you pay the bill.

The Work Authorization

If you cannot wait for an estimate, you can ask the shop to prepare the estimate and call you for a verbal approval. **The repair shop cannot charge you for any work done without your authorization.**

And, if additional work is required beyond the original estimate, your authorization must be obtained before they continue. If the necessary work cannot be estimated, you may waive your right to a written estimate and give a general written authorization allowing the repair shop to make all "reasonable and necessary" repairs, but you should be sure to state the **maximum** amount of money you're willing to spend.

Return of Parts

You are entitled to the return of any replaced parts, if you request them before or at the time the car is returned to you. If the parts have to be returned to the manufacturer, you are entitled to inspect them before they are sent.

Ask if any parts to be replaced will be new, used, or rebuilt. Any new part should come with a warranty; be sure to ask for it.

The Invoice

Check the invoice (also known as the work order) carefully, making sure you understand everything that was done and what you are paying for. Ask about anything that you do not understand. Be sure to get a legible copy of the work order for your records. The charges for parts and labor must be itemized separately and indicate the use of any new, rebuilt, reconditioned or used parts.

Test Drive Before You Pay the Bill.

If you have made arrangements to do so, test drive the car before you pay your bill to determine whether the problem is solved.

Always keep a copy of all work orders and receipts for as long as you own the car.

If You Have a Complaint

If you have a complaint about towing or repairs, contact the Department of Motor Vehicles, Division of Dealers and Repairers, 60 State Street, Wethersfield, Connecticut 06209, or visit their website at: www.ct.gov/dmv

If you have a complaint about the advertising of towing or repair services, contact the State Department of Consumer Protection, 165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, Connecticut 06106. You may download a complaint form from our website at: www.ct.gov/dcp

DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER PROTECTION

Fact Sheet

Automotive REPAIR BASICS

What You Need to Know!



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Each year, nearly 1,700 persons contact the Department of Consumer Protection with a complaint involving repairs to their vehicle. The best way to avoid such repair problems is to be prepared and informed.

Learn how your vehicle works and how to identify common car problems. The more you know, the more likely you'll be able to head off costly repairs. You can detect many common problems by inspecting the area around your vehicle for leaks, listening for strange noises, being aware of a difference in the way your vehicle handles, or even by noticing unusual odors. It's also important to choose a good technician, ask the right questions, and know your consumer rights.

Here are some tips for handling automobile work, whether it be unexpected or routine maintenance planned in advance.

If Your Car Breaks Down on the Road

- Get the car as far off the road as possible.
- Set out flares or reflective triangles to indicate that you have stopped.
- Stay with your car until help arrives. If you feel you are in any danger, stay inside the car with the doors locked until the police arrive.
- If your car must be towed, check the owner's manual for instructions. Some cars must be towed backwards; others require a flatbed tow.
- Local police often have a list of available towing services if you get stranded. Confirm the cost **before** you allow your car to be hooked up to the truck.

- Make every effort to remove your car as soon as you can from the service station where it has been towed, unless you plan to have your car repaired there. Otherwise, you will be charged daily storage fees.
- Remove all valuables from the car before you leave it.
- If you have questions about towing fees, contact the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles, Dealers and Repairers Division at (860) 263-5056.

Comparison Shop for Repairs

Most consumers usually do a great job when comparing prices for appliances, furniture and food, but fall short when it comes to auto repair. Too often, the first estimate is the one they accept.

If your car still runs and you know what needs to be fixed, try to get at least three estimates. If you don't know what's wrong and a mechanic has to look the car over, you may have to pay a diagnosis charge. Even though you may not want to get additional estimates and pay more diagnosis fees, you may find that even three such charges add up to a small fraction of the cost you'd pay at an over-priced repair shop. Shop around if you can!

Who's Doing the Work? In Connecticut, only the shop has to be licensed, not the individual mechanic. You may want to do a credential check before you leave your car for repair.

Ask whether the mechanic who will work on your car has a certificate from the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence. Those who do will post their certificates at their service stations.

If you want even more assurance, ask the service station representative to write down the name of the mechanic on your estimate, along with a note stating that this mechanic holds such a certificate.

Diagnosing the Problem

Describe your car's symptoms to the mechanic. BUT — unless you're sure what the problem is, don't diagnose it yourself. You may end up paying for more than is needed.

About Diagnostic Fees... Repair shops must post a sign indicating if there is a fee for a diagnosis or an estimate. If the fee is more than \$50, a written consent must be obtained from you.

Get an estimate! You have the right to a written estimate before the repair work is done if the total cost of the repair will be more than \$50. An estimate will help you determine if you really want the work done!

A repair shop cannot work on your car without your authorization first. (If the repair cost is projected at less than \$50, you can still get a written estimate if you ask for one.) Be sure to ask how long the work will take.